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THE CRIME OF THE ABOLITIONISTS.

What is the Crime of the Abolitionists? It is not that they are bloody men :—for they are pre-eminently men of peace. It is not that they make unconstitutional or unjust laws :—for they are too few to be able to make any laws. It is that they presume to discuss Slavery. This is their crime—their only crime. Every other subject may be discussed. Southern slaveholders and their Northern satellites do themselves help send missionaries all around the globe to argue for the overthrow of idolatry and other forms of error. Indeed, there is no wrong and no subject, which they forbid to have inquired into, save Slavery. Inquiry into this they forbid with an intolerance, that is vindictive and murderous to the last degree. So it has always been ; and so it is now. The numerous mobs only a year and a half ago proved it was so then. It was so when Gerrit Smith made his Speech October 22d 1835 to the large body of men, who were that day assembled in Peterboro, and who had the day before been driven from Utica by a numerous and infuriate mob. That old Speech, which has just now fallen under our eye, we think it well to have reprinted. The arguments in it against the denial of the right to discuss Slavery are as sound and as seasonable now as they were then.

OCTOBER 1st 1862.

X.

SPEECH OF GERRIT SMITH, IN THE MEETING OF THE NEW YORK ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY, HELD IN PETERBORO OCTOBER 22D 1835.

Mr. SMITH rose to move and advocate the adoption of the following Resolution, viz:

RESOLVED, THAT THE RIGHT OF FREE DISCUSSION, GIVEN TO US BY GOD, AND ASSERTED AND GUARDED BY THE LAWS OF OUR COUNTRY, IS A RIGHT SO VITAL TO MAN'S FREEDOM, AND DIGNITY, AND USEFULNESS, THAT WE CAN NEVER BE GUILTY OF ITS SURRENDER, WITHOUT CONSENTING TO EXCHANGE THAT FREEDOM FOR SLAVERY, AND THAT DIGNITY AND USEFULNESS FOR DEBASEMENT AND WORTHLESSNESS.

Mr. SMITH remarked, that he was not a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and not yet prepared to become such—that his reasons for not approving of all the plans and proceedings of the Society, so far as to unite himself with it, were before the public; and that it would be both unfeasible and egotistical for him now to mention them. He stood up in the meeting under the courtesy of its Resolution, inviting him to take a part in its deliberations and proceedings. Let me say, however, (said Mr. SMITH,) that the great principles of your Society have ever been my principles; and, that it is meet I should share with you in the odium and peril of holding those principles. At such a time as this, when you are nobly jeoparding, for truth's sake, and humanity's sake, property and reputation and life, I feel it to be not only my duty, but my privilege and pleasure, to identify myself with you, as far as I conscientiously can, and to expose my property and reputation and life to the same dangers, which threaten yours.—Passing events (said Mr. S.) admonish me of the necessity there is, that the friends of human rights should act in concert: and, with all my objections to your Society, it is not only possible but probable, that I shall soon find myself obliged to become a member of it.

But to come to the Resolution before us—(which Mr. S. said he had himself drawn up, and handed to the committee on resolutions)—I love the free and happy form of civil government under which I live: not because it confers new rights on me. My rights all spring from an infinitely nobler source—from the favor and grace of God. Our political and constitutional rights, so called, are but the natural and inherent rights of man, asserted, carried out, and secured by modes of human contrivance. To no human charter am I indebted for my rights. They pertain to my original constitution: and I read them in that Book of books, which is the great Charter of man's rights. No, the constitutions of my nation and state create none of my rights. They do, at the most, but recognize what it was not theirs to give.

My reason, therefore, for loving a republican form of government, and for preferring it to any other—to monarchical and despotic governments—is, not that it clothes me with rights, which these withhold from me; but, that it makes fewer encroachments than they do, on the rights, which God gave me—on the divinely appointed scope of man's agency. I prefer, in a word, the republican system, because it comes up more nearly to God's system. It is not then to the constitutions of my nation and state, that I am indebted for the right of free discussion: though I am thankful for the glorious defence with which those instruments surround that right. No, God himself gave me this right: and a sufficient proof that He did so, is to be found

in the fact, that He requires me to exercise it. Take from the men, who compose the church of Christ on earth, the right of free discussion, and you disable them for His service. They are now the lame and the dumb and the blind. In vain is it now, that you bid them "hold forth the word of life"—in vain that you bid them "not to suffer sin upon a neighbor, but in any wise to rebuke him"—in vain is it, that you bid them "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." If God made me to be one of His instruments for carrying forward the salvation of the world, then is the right of free discussion among my inherent rights: then may I, must I, speak of sin, any sin, every sin, that comes in any way—any sin, every sin, which it is my duty to search out and to assail. When, therefore, this right is called in question, then is the invasion, not of something obtained from human convention and human concession; but the invasion of a birthright—of that which is as old as our being, and a part of the original man.

This right, so sacred, is sought to be trammelled. It is virtually denied. What I have said is introductory to the expression of my dissent from the tenor of the language, with which this invasion is generally met. This right is, for the most part, defended on the ground, that it is given to us by our political constitutions; and that it was purchased for us by the blood and toil of our fathers. Now, I wish to see its defence placed on its true and infinitely higher ground: on the ground, that God gave it to us; and that he, who violates or betrays it, is guilty, not alone of dishonoring the laws of his country and the blood and toil and memory of his fathers; but, that he is guilty also of making war upon God's plan of man's constitution and endowments; and of attempting to narrow down and destroy that dignity, with which God invested him, when He made him in his own image, and but "little lower than the angels." When, therefore, we would defend this right, let us not defend it so much with the jealousy of an American—a Republican—as though it were but an American or a Republican right, and could claim no higher origin than human will and human statutes: but let us defend it as men, feeling that to lose it, is to lose a part of ourselves: let us defend it as men, determined to maintain, even to their extreme boundary, the rights and powers, which God has given to us for our usefulness and enjoyment; and the surrender of an iota of which is treason against Heaven.

There is one class of men, whom it especially behoves to be tenacious of the right of free discussion. I mean the poor. The rich and the honorable, if divested of this right, have still their wealth and their honors to repose on, and to solace them. But, when the poor are stripped of this right, they are poor indeed. The unhappy men, who composed the mob in Utica yesterday, are of this class. May they yet learn, and before it is too late, how suicidal was the violence, to WHICH THE LIPS AND PENS OF THEIR SUPERIORS STIMULATED THEM: and that, in attacking this most precious right in your persons, they were most efficiently contributing to hasten its destruction in their own: a right too in respect to which the poor man is the equal of the richest and the proudest; and his possession of which is all, that saves him from being trampled upon in Republican

America by the despotism of wealth and titles, as that despotism tramples upon him elsewhere, where he is not permitted to tell the story of his wrongs, and to resist oppression by that power, which even wealth and titles cannot withstand—the power of the lips and the Press. Let the poor man count as his enemy, and his worst enemy, every invader of the right of free discussion.

We are threatened with legislative restraints on this right. Let us tell our legislators in advance, that this is a right, restraints on which, we will not, cannot bear; and that every attempt to restrain it is a palpable wrong against God and man. Submitting to these restraints, we could not be what God made us to be; we could not perform the service, to which He has appointed us; we could not be men. Laws to gag a man—to conceal the gushing fountains of his heart's sympathy—and to shrivel up his soul by extinguishing its ardor and generosity—are laws not to assist him in carrying out God's high and holy purposes in calling him into being; but they are laws to throw him a passive, mindless, worthless being at the feet of despotism.

And to what end is it that we are called on to hold our tongues, and throw down our pens, and give up our influence? Were it for a good object, and could we conceive that such a sacrifice would promote it, there would be a color of fitness in asking us to do so. But, this is a sacrifice, which righteousness and humanity never invoke. Truth and mercy require the exertion—never the suppression, of man's noble rights and powers. We are called on to degrade and unman ourselves, and to withhold from others that influence, which we are bound to exert upon them, to the end that the victim of oppression may lie more quietly beneath the foot of his oppressor: to the end, that one sixth of our countrymen, plundered of their dearest rights—of their bodies, and minds and souls—may never know of those rights; to the end, that TWO MILLIONS AND A HALF of our fellow men, crushed in the iron folds of slavery, may remain in all their suffering and debasement and despair. It is for such an object—an object so wicked and inexpressibly mean—that we are called on to lie down beneath the slaveholders' blustering and menace, like whipped and trembling spaniels. We reply, that our Republican spirit cannot thus succumb; and what is infinitely more, that God did not make us—that Jesus did not redeem us for such sinful and vile uses.

We know before, that slavery could not survive free discussion; that the minds of men could not remain firm and their consciences quiet under the continued appeals of truth, and justice, and mercy; but the demand, which slaveholders now make on us to surrender the right of free discussion, together with their avowed reasons for this demand, involves their own full concession, that free discussion is incompatible with slavery. The South now admits by her own showing, that slavery cannot live, unless the North be tongue-tied. But we have two objections to being tongue-tied. One is, that we desire and purpose to exert all our powers and influence—lawfully, temperately, kindly—to persuade the slaveholders of the South to deliver our colored brethren from their bonds: nor shall we give rest to our lips or pens, until this righteous object is accomplished: and the other is, that we are not willing to be slaves ourselves. The enormous and insolent demands of the South, sustained, I am deeply ashamed to say, by craven and mercenary spirits at the North, manifest, beyond all dispute, that the question now is, not merely, nor mainly, whether the blacks at the South shall remain slaves—but whether the whites at the North shall become slaves also. And thus, while we are endeavoring to break the yokes, which are on others' necks, we are to see to it, that yokes are not imposed on our own.

Is it said that the South will not molest our freedom, if we

will not disturb their slavery—if we will not insist on the liberty to speak and write about this abomination? Our reply is, that God gave us the freedom for which we contend—that it is not a freedom bestowed by man;—not an *ex gratia* freedom, which we have received at the hands of the South;—not a freedom, which stands, on the one hand, in the surrender of our dearest rights, and, on the other, in the conceded perpetuity of the body and mind and soul-crushing system of American slavery. We ask not, we accept not, we scornfully reject, the conditional and worthless freedom, which the South proffers us.

It is not to be disguised, that a war has broken out between the North and the South.—Political and commercial men are industriously striving to restore peace: but the peace, which they would effect, is superficial, false, and temporary. True, permanent peace can never be restored, until slavery, the occasion of the war, has ceased. The sword, which is now drawn, will never be returned to its scabbard, until victory, entire, decisive victory is ours or theirs; not, until that broad and deep and damning stain on our country's escutcheon is clean washed out—that plague spot on our country's honor gone forever;—or, until slavery has riveted anew her present chains, and brought our heads also to bow beneath her withering power. It is idle—it is criminal, to hope for the restoration of peace, on any other condition. Why, not to speak of other outrages, which the South has practised on the rights and persons of Northern men, who can read the simple and honest account, which Amos Dresser gives of his sufferings at the hands of slaveholders, and still flatter himself with the belief, that the North can again shake hands with slavery?—If the Church members and Church elders, who sat in mock judgment on that young man's case, could be impelled by the infernal spirit of slavery to such lawless, ruffian violence; how can any reasonable hope remain, that, whilst the South remains under the malign influences of slavery, its general demeanor towards the North can be even tolerable? The head and front of Dresser's offending, was his connexion with an Anti-Slavery Society in a distant State: and for this he was subjected by professors, and titled professors too, of the meek and peaceful religion of Jesus, to corporeal punishment—public disgraceful, severe.

Who shall be mustered on our side for this great battle? Not the many. The many never come to such a side as ours, until attracted to it by palpable and unequivocal signs of its triumph. Nor do we need the many. A chosen few are all we need. Nor do we desire those, who are skillful in the use of carnal weapons. For such weapons we have no use. Truth and love are inscribed on our banners, and "by these we conquer." There is no room in our ranks for the politician, who, to secure the votes of the South, would consent that American slavery be perpetual. There is no room in them for the commercial man, who, to secure the trade of the South, is ready to applaud the institution of slavery, and to leave his countrymen—his brethren—their children and children's children—subjected to its tender mercies, throughout all future time. We have no room, no work for such. We want men, who stand on the rock of christian principles; men who will speak, and write, and act with invincible honesty and firmness; men, who will vindicate the right of discussion, knowing that it is derived from God; and who, knowing this, will vindicate it against all the threats and arts of demagogues, and money worshippers, and in the face of mobs, and of death. There is room in our ranks for the old and decrepit, as well as the young and vigorous. The hands that are tremulous with years, are the best hands to grasp the sword of the spirit. The aged servants of God best know how "to move the arm which moves the world." Our work, in a word, is the work of God; and they are the best suited to it, who are most accustomed to do His work.